

INFORMATION SHARING: A RECIPE FOR INNOVATIVE WORK BEHAVIOUR IN SMALL AND MEDIUM MANUFACTURING ENTERPRISES IN TANZANIA

²Happy Mwakajila

³Severine Kessy

Abstract

Innovative Work Behaviour is widely recognized as a key factor in firm competitiveness. However, empirical studies linking information sharing and Innovative Work Behaviour in small and medium manufacturing enterprises are scanty. The aim of this study is to examine the influence of information sharing on Innovative Work Behaviour in small and medium manufacturing enterprises in Tanzania. Specifically, the study examines the influence of information sharing on Creativity-Oriented Innovative Work Behaviour and the influence of information sharing on Implementation-Oriented Innovative Work Behaviour. Data was collected from 389 small and medium manufacturing enterprises in four regions; Dar es Salaam, Mbeya, Manyara and Morogoro. Mean and Structural Equation Modelling were used to analyse data. The inferential results revealed that information sharing has an insignificant influence on Creativity-Oriented Innovative Work Behaviour and information sharing has a significant influence on Implementation-Oriented Innovative Work Behaviour. Theoretically, the study results proved the applicability of the Social Exchange Theory in the Tanzanian context and the results provide insights that may be used by small and medium manufacturing enterprises owners or managers to influence innovative work behaviour of their employees. The study recommends that owners or managers must make sure that they share important information with their employees. They have to make sure that employees are informed on the products offered by a business, performance of a business, market requirements, level of customer satisfaction needed for the products offered and business plan. Additionally, employees should be informed on the visions and missions of organisations.

Key Words: *Information Sharing, Innovative Work Behaviour, Creativity-Oriented Innovative Work Behaviour, Implementation-Oriented Innovative Work Behaviour, and Small and Medium Manufacturing Enterprises.*

INTRODUCTION

Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) are key drivers of socio-economic development and competitiveness of the world economies. It has been one of the most important sectors that play a vital role in promoting economic growth and reducing poverty in developing countries (Luge, Mapunda, Kitomo & Mihayo, 2021; Popadić, Živanović, & Živanovic, 2022; Tonya & Samwel, 2024). In African countries, SMEs account for a major share of production and employment. In Tanzania, the SMEs sector serves as the breeding ground for emerging entrepreneurs as well as the backbone of the indigenous private sector (Tonya & Samwel, 2024; Makorere, 2014).

²Happy Mwakajila, Lecturer, Department of Human Resource Management, Institute of Social Work, happy.mwakajila@isw.ac.tz

³Severine Kessy, Senior Lecturer, Department of General Management, University of Dar es Salaam Business School, severine.kessy@udbs.ac.tz

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The sector is also recognised as an important sector that employs more than 33% of total employment (Tonya & Samwel, 2024), particularly for people with low skill levels. 90% of companies in the manufacturing sector in Tanzania are SMEs, which contribute up to 5.25% of the GDP (URT, 2021). The sector also plays an important role in the government effort in transforming the country into a middle income country (URT, 2021). Despite the importance small and medium manufacturing enterprises play in Tanzania, they still face high failure rate, many of them are underperforming and they are unable to compete in the market (Madatta & Chen, 2020; Mori, Kazungu & Mchopa, 2014). However, it is contended that challenges facing SMEs may be well addressed by innovation. Ukpabio, Oyebisi & Siyanbola (2019) provide that innovation is the major strategy and driving force for firms' growth and survival in any competitive business environment. This idea concurs with Halawa, Sridadi, Hardiana, Sundari, Zain & Ramadhan (2023) who assert that firms that have success and register the quickest growth are those that apply innovative solutions in their daily activities. Therefore, innovation is very important for manufacturing small and medium enterprises so as to enhance survival and competitiveness.

Innovation is no longer dependent on specialists as it is every employee's task (Hu, 2023; Ngan 2015). Every employee in the organization can play a role in helping or making a firm innovate by engaging in Innovative Work Behaviour (IWB). Researchers (such as Burcker & Horst, 2017; De-Jong, 2007 & Dorenbosch, 2005) describe IWB to include two main types of behaviour; behaviour related to creativity (Creativity Oriented Innovative Work Behaviour- COIWB) and behaviour related to implementation of creative ideas (Implementation Oriented Innovative Work Behaviour- IOIWB). Therefore, this study involves two dimensions of IWB which are COIWB and IOIWB.

COIWB is a discretionary behaviour directed towards initiation of new, useful ideas, processes, and products or procedures. It involves behaviour directed towards problem recognition, idea exploration and idea generation (Chakauya & Masianoga, 2023, Leong & Rasli, 2013). This study defines COIWB as a behaviour directed towards opportunity exploration and idea generation. It includes behaviours directed towards finding new approaches to execute tasks and generate new solutions for problems. IOIWB is a discretionary behaviour directed towards implementation of new, useful ideas, processes, products or procedures, within a work role, group or organization (Labrenz, 2014; Nguyen, 2023). It involves behaviours directed towards promotion and implementation of useful ideas, processes or procedures (Chakauya & Masianoga, 2023; Hu, 2023; Leong & Rasli 2013). This study defines IOIWB as a behaviour directed towards promotion of ideas (finding support) for new products, services, processes and techniques and apply the promoted ideas in every day work processes. IWB assists employees in recognizing problems in the organization and creating solutions for them (Mwakajila, Kessy & Sanga, 2019). As provided by Bos-Nehles & Veendaal (2017) and Burcker and Horst (2017), the IWB of employees is a specific key asset for the success of a firm in a fast-changing business environment as it improves effectiveness and sustains competitive advantage for a firm.

Given the importance of IWB in an organization literature, scholars such as Morales, Contreras & Pacheco (2024); Mwakajila, Kessy & Sanga (2019); and Zhu & Mu (2016) identify factors that influence IWB. These factors include leadership style, employee's individual factors, work group relations, organizational climate, knowledge sharing, employee participation and Human Resource Management practices. Battistelli, Odoardi, Vandenberghe, Napoli & Piccione, (2019; Bos-Nehles, 2017)) also mention information sharing as an influential factor for IWB include . Xi Li and Sandino (2017) assert that

information sharing provides employees with greater access to information thus enhancing their creative abilities. This idea is supported by Athwaria (2019) who asserts that information sharing provides employees with data that is timely and relevant to their particular work process thereby influencing them to be creative and implementers of creative ideas. Therefore, this study considers information sharing as a driving factor necessary for IWB.

Information sharing is a process of sending and receiving information among members of the organization in order to strengthen the decision-making process. According to Savolainen (2017), the process incorporates two major aspects, that is, giving information to others, and receiving information that has been provided by the information giver. In this study, information sharing is defined as a Human Resource Management practice where the management shares with the employees' important information and data that are crucial to the success of an organization. Information such as mission of the organization, future plans, business results of the firm and the full-service package of the company are important pieces of information shared to employees through information sharing practice. This view is supported by Suksod and Cruthaka (2020) who provide that information such as future events and financial position are main important information items that employees receive through the process of information sharing. The information that employees receive influences their behaviour. As stressed by Bos-Nehles & Veenendaal (2017), openness of organizational actors is important for influencing employees' innovativeness when it comes to organizational information.

Despite the fact that information sharing is an important dimension for influencing IWB, it has been rarely studied. Few previous researches (e.g. Bos-Nehles and Veendaal, 2019) are noted to be dealing with information sharing and IWB considers information sharing as part of Human Resource Management and not as an individual practice which influences IWB individually. Each HRM practice dimension has a different influence on employees' outcome. Moreover, studies conducted on information sharing and IWB (e.g. Battistelli et al., 2019) did not study the direct effect of information sharing on IWB. Instead, they studied the indirect effect of information sharing on IWB through work-based learning by challenging tasks and organizational commitment. In addition, the conducted studies (Battistelli et al., 2019; Bos-Nehles and Veendaal, 2019) consider IWB as a one-dimensional variable. However, IWB includes two dimensions which are COIWB, and IOIWB (Chakauya & Masianoga, 2023; De Jong & Den Hartog, 2010, Dorenbosch et al., 2005). Considering the classification of IWB, it is important to know the influence of information sharing on each category of IWB.

Given the identified gaps, there was a need for the study on the influence of information sharing on IWB applying Social Exchange Theory (SET). The theory is used to explain the factors that influence IWB because it is among the most influential theories for understanding of work place behaviour (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2007). The theory provides that obligation is generated through a series of reciprocal interdependence between parties who are in reciprocal interdependence (Blau, 1964). From this perspective, employees who perceive their organizational environment as supportive, feel obligated to reciprocate with behaviours that are beneficial to the organization. Therefore, this study creates knowledge on how information sharing influences employees' IWB (COIWB and IOIWB) required for increasing small and medium manufacturing enterprises' ability to compete in the market. This is because of the important role small and medium manufacturing enterprises play in transforming most developing economies, including Tanzania.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Perspective

This study is guided by the Social Exchange Theory (SET). According to Settoon and Bennett (1996), the theory has long been used by organizational researchers to describe the motivational basis behind employee behaviours. The theory is based on the concepts of norm of reciprocity (Gouldner, 1960) and the social exchange (Blau, 1964). The theory argues that obligation is generated through a series of interactions between parties who are in reciprocal interdependence (Blau, 1964). According to Saks (2006), reciprocity involves rules of exchange whereby the actions of one part lead to response or action by the other part. This exchange requires a bidirectional transaction (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). Something has to be given and something returned. If one part supplies a benefit, a receiving part should respond in kind.

In this study, reciprocity within an organization refers to the cooperative exchange between employees and the management. The general assumption is that, employees form a social exchange relationship with their employing organizations in which they strive to repay the organization for any support directed towards them by increasing the effort to help the organization achieve its goals (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). In this study, IWB represents employees' discretionary behaviour exchange in response to favourable actions of the management. Employees may choose to be innovative as a result of reciprocating to what the organization has done for them. When an organization shares important information with employees, employees will feel obliged to reciprocate to the organizations through positive behaviours (Bos-Nehles & Veenendaal, 2017). Therefore, if organizations place importance in building long term relationship with their employees, it is more likely to foster acceptable behaviour such as IWB.

Hypotheses Development

Prokop & Stejskal (2017) provide that the innovation process is highly associated with information sharing. Management adopts information sharing as an important and effective tool to enhance and strengthen the employees' commitment to the organization (Alduais, Raoush, Samara & Sartawi, 2023)). Since IWB is a discretion behaviour (Holmes, 2022), it has been proposed that information sharing can affect discretionary efforts through their influence on employees' skills & motivation (Anjum *et al.*, 2016). Drawing on the norm of reciprocity as complemented in SET, a relationship between information sharing and IWB is proposed. Blau (1964) postulates that a benefit received from one party creates a social obligation to provide some benefits in return. When employees receive information, they feel obligated to innovate.

Since IWB has two dimensions, COIWB and IOIWB, information sharing is considered to positively influence COIWB. Athwaria (2019) asserts that information sharing provides employees with data that is timely and relevant to their particular work process, thereby influencing them to be creative. According to Xi Li and Sandino (2017), information sharing provides employees with greater access to information thus enhancing their creative abilities. This is supported by Bos-Nehles and Veenendaal (2017) who observe that information sharing influences IWB. Based on this argument, the following hypothesis was developed:

H1: Information sharing has a positive influence on COIWB

Information sharing is also considered to influence IOIWB. Bos-Nehles and Veenendaal (2017) argue that employees' perceptions that information is being shared is expected to result in higher levels of IWB engagement because, if employees understand the goals and objectives of the organization, they will identify with the organizational goals and help the organization to achieve them. According to Alduais et al., (2023) and Halonen (2010), information sharing helps in informing employees about crucial decisions affecting transferring of initiated innovations into implementation. Based on this, this study concludes that information sharing will influence IOIWB, leading to the following hypothesis:

H2: Information sharing has a positive influence on IOIWB

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Methods and Materials

The study applied a cross-sectional survey method since the study examines the influence of information sharing on IWB in small and medium manufacturing enterprises whereby data collected once from respondents fulfilled the purpose of this study. As supported by Easterby-Smith *et al.*, (2008), the cross sectional survey design allows for testing the influence of one variable on other variables in a single point. The study was conducted in four regions namely Dar es Salaam, Morogoro, Mbeya, and Manyara. Data were collected by using questionnaire from 389 small and medium manufacturing enterprises. The collected data were analysed by using Mean (M) and Structural Equation Modelling (SEM). The use of SEM was deemed appropriate because of the need to test multiple relationships simultaneously. In assessing the internal consistency, the Cronbach alpha coefficients of all variables were at least 0.7 and demonstrated that there was internal consistency as suggested by Nunnally (1967).

Measurement of Variables

The study variables include information sharing and IWB. Information sharing is an independent variable and IWB is a dependent variable. Information sharing was measured using a scale adapted from Boselie et al., (2000). The scale has been used in other studies such as Battistelli et al., (2019) and Odoardi (2015). The sample item for information sharing include "I am well informed of the vision and mission of the business", "I am well informed of the business results", and "I am well informed of the future plans of the business". IWB was examined as a two dimensional variable including COIWB and IOIWB. The scale for measuring IWB was adapted from De Jong and Den Hartog (2010) and Scott and Bruce (1994). Their scales have been widely used by other researchers (e.g. Abstein & Spieth, 2014; Bos-Nehles & Veenendaal, 2019; Bysted, 2013; Wojtczuk-Tur ek, 2014) to measure IWB. The sample items for COIWB include: "find new approaches to execute tasks" and "I search out for new working methods and techniques." The IOIWB sample items include "I promote ideas to colleagues so that they have a chance to become implemented by others" and "I participate in implementation of ideas". Responses to items ranged from 1 -strongly disagree to 5- strongly agree.

FINDINGS

Multivariate Assumptions

This study applied SEM as the data analysis technique to test the hypotheses in order to make inferences about the large population from which the sample was drawn. However, the use of

SEM and much other multivariate analysis techniques has to be guided by multivariate assumptions. Based on this, the study tested several assumptions including normality, linearity, homoscedasticity and multicollinearity as suggested by Hair *et al.*, (2010), Kline (2011) and Daoud (2017) that they are important assumptions to guide multivariate analysis.

Normality can be tested by graphical analysis and statistical tests (Hair *et al.*, 2010). In this study, graphical analysis involved the use of histograms. The observed variables were assessed and found to be fairly normally distributed. The graphical test was then confirmed by a statistical test. Statisticians such as Kim (2013) suggested that for sample sizes greater than 300, the absolute values of skewness below 2 and kurtosis below 7 without considering z-values are considered normally distributed. The observed variables in this study were examined, values for skewness index did not exceed 1 and values for kurtosis index did not exceed 3. This indicates that the distribution is normal. The study tested for linearity assumptions by using P P plots. The results show that data concentrated along the straight line; which proves that there is linearity. The homoscedasticity was also assessed in order to check if data fits for SEM analysis. The results for testing homoscedasticity in this study indicated that there was no problem of heteroscedasticity of data since the scatter plot exhibited equal dispersion across all data values. On testing for multicollinearity, the calculated VIFs were less than 10 and TV was greater than 0.1 as recommended by William (2015). This shows that there was no multicollinearity problem among the variables.

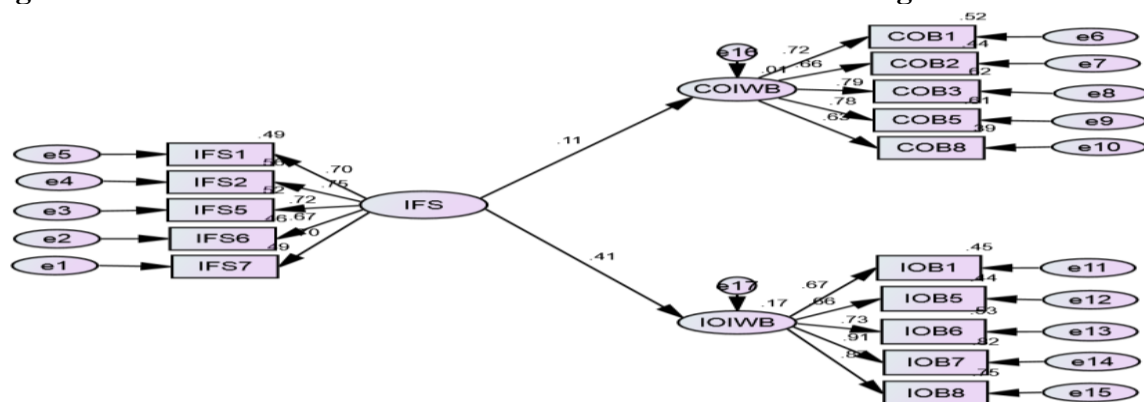
Measurement Model

Prior to testing the hypothesis by using SEM, it is important to assure the status of a measurement model. To do so, the overall CFA for the study was performed. The initial model included three variables; information sharing and two dimensions of IWB (COIWB and IOIWB). Information sharing was captured by eight (8) items, COIWB was captured by eight (8) items and IOIWB was captured by eight (8) items as well. The initial model provided poor fit. After modification by elimination of the items with poor factor loadings, information sharing remained with five (5) items, COIWB remained with five (5) items and IOIWB remained with five (5) items as well. The modified model yielded a chi-square of 715.616 with the degree of freedom (df) of 539 and P-value of 0.000. Other goodness of fit indices were in good range: GFI= .901, AGFI= 0.885, CFI= 0.969 and RMSEA = 0.031. Moreover, the standardized regression weight for the items ranged from 0.636-0.901 and the squared multiple correlation ranged from 0.405-0.812.

Structural Model

According to Hair *et al.*, (2006), the structural model specifies the nature and magnitude of the relationship between variables. At this stage, the focus shifted from the relationship between variables and their specific manifest variables to the structural relationship among the latent variables of the study. The structural model in this study comprises measurement model and structural model. The model tested the hypothesized relationship between variables. It demonstrates the influence of information sharing on COIWB and IOIWB. Figure 1 presents the model on the direct relationship between information sharing and IWB.

Figure 1: Structural Model on the Influence of Information Sharing on IWB



Source: Field data (2024)

***significant at 0.001

The goodness of fit indices of the hypothesized model was assessed. The model yielded a chi-square of 309.033 with degrees of freedom of 117 and a p-value of 0.000. In addition, GFI= 0.906, AGFI=0.878, CFI=0.943 and RMSEA= 0.067. In general, the fit indices indicate that the model adequately fitted to the data. CMIN/DF should be less than 5, GFI> 0.90, AGFI> 0.80, CFI> 0.90 and RMSEA \leq to 0.1.

Hypotheses Testing

To test the influence of information sharing on IWB, two sub hypotheses namely H1 and H2 were developed since IWB is divided into two dimensions: COIWB and IOIWB. H1 states that information sharing has a positive influence on COIWB and hypothesis H2 states that information sharing has a positive influence on IOIWB. The SEM analysis results showed that there was insignificant influence of information sharing on COIWB ($\beta = 0.122$, insignificant at 0.077). Therefore, this hypothesis was not supported. However, the results show that H2 was supported since there was a significant influence of information sharing on IOIWB ($\beta = 0.428$, significant at 0.001). The summary of the results is provided in Table 1.

Table 1: Results on Hypothesis Testing for the Influence of Information Sharing on IWB

Hypothesis	Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P	Label	Remarks
IFS \rightarrow COIWB	.122	.069	1.767	.077	par_1	Insignificant
IFS \rightarrow IOIWB	.428	.069	6.167	***	par_2	Significant

*** means it is significant at 0.001

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

To examine the influence of information sharing on IWB was the objective of this study. The descriptive results for information sharing revealed that small and medium manufacturing enterprises were highly informed ($M > 4$) on vision and mission, product offered by a business, performance of a business, business results and market requirements. However, information sharing on future plans was least applied ($M < 3.5$).

The study hypothesizes that information sharing has a positive influence on COIWB and information sharing has a positive influence on IOIWB. The inferential results revealed that information sharing has an insignificant influence on COIWB and information sharing has a positive significant influence on IOIWB. Based on descriptive results, explanation is found

regarding the insignificant influence of information sharing on COIWB. The results show that small and medium manufacturing enterprises employees were being less informed on future business plans. When employees have less information on future plans they do not engage in generating new ideas. When it comes to organizational information, the openness of organizational actors is important in influencing employees' innovative solutions for achieving organizational goals (Bos- Nehles, 2016).

Focusing on the significant influence of information sharing on IOIWB, the finding is supported by descriptive results which show that employees were highly informed of the product offered by the business, performance of the business and market requirements. When employees are informed on different matters concerning the organization, they tend to be influenced to engage in IWB. As supported by Anjum et al., (2016), employees who perceive that their organization shares information with them, show greater IWB.

The significant influence of information sharing on IOIWB is well grounded by SET that guided this study. It is evident from this finding that, when employees receive information, they feel obligated to innovate. As supported by Xi Li and Sandino (2017), information sharing provides employees with greater access to information thus enhancing their creative abilities through a more diverse pool of ideas and affects their engagement in innovativeness by increasing accountability for the quality of their creative work.

The study findings are in line with the findings by Bos-Nehles & Veenendaal (2017). The study conducted by Bos-Nehles & Veenendaal (2017) provides that information sharing influences IWB. The study further provides that employees who perceive their organization as sharing information repay the organization with IWB. However, their study focused on IWB as a one dimensional variable. This study went further explaining the influence of information sharing on both dimensions of IWB (COIWB and IOIWB).

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATION

To attain the study objective, the study hypothesized that information sharing has a positive influence on COIWB and information sharing has a positive influence on IOIWB. The study found out that information sharing has insignificant influence on COIWB and information sharing has a significant positive influence on IOIWB. Basing on the findings, the study concludes that information sharing significantly and positively influences IOIWB. Specifically, sharing information with employees on products offered by a business, performance of a business, market requirements and level of customer satisfaction for the products offered, influence employees to engage in IOIWB. In this case, information sharing is one of the HRM practices that influence employees to engage in behaviour directed towards promotion of ideas for new products, services, processes and techniques and apply the promoted ideas in every day work processes.

Literature on the influence of information sharing on IWB in small and medium manufacturing enterprises is still scanty, not only in Tanzania where most of SMEs are not able to compete in the market, but worldwide in general. Therefore, this study makes important contributions to information sharing and IWB literature in general. The theoretical contribution of this study comes from the framework based on SET. Generally, SET argues that the reactions of employees depend on the actions of their employers. Something has to be given and something returned. The findings of this study contribute to SET because it was

revealed that employees choose to be innovative as a result of reciprocating to what the organization has done for them.

Practically, the results of this study tell the small and medium manufacturing enterprises owners or managers that information sharing is a catalyst for their employee IWB. Therefore, they have to make sure that they share important information with their employees if they need them to be innovative. They have to make sure that employees are informed on the products offered by a business, performance of a business, market requirements, level of customer satisfaction needed for the products offered and business plan. Additionally, employees should be informed on the visions and missions of organization.

LIMITATION OF THE STUDY

Although this study contributed in establishing the theoretical framework based on SET, it is a good practice to highlight the areas where the study fell short and thereby open up new directions for further research. This study mainly focused on the small and medium manufacturing enterprises. As such, the findings can only be generalized in the manufacturing sector of SMEs and not on the other SMEs sectors such as those dealing with trade and services. This is due to the fact that the small and medium manufacturing enterprises differ from other types of SMES (trade and services) in terms of their characteristics (Mora-Esquivel, Varela-Jiménez & Leiva, 2018; Lejárraga, Rizzo, Oberhofer, Stone, & Shepherd, 2014). Moreover, this study is deductive in nature, which limited the ability to provide in-depth qualitative information on why information sharing insignificantly influences COIWB.

AREA FOR FURTHER STUDIES

Based on the mentioned limitations in the previous subsection, there are several possible directions for future research. First, it is important to conduct a similar study on other categories of SMEs (service and trade). However, the results of these studies will not change the results of study in small and medium manufacturing enterprises, rather they will provide more information on the influence of information sharing on IWB in other SMEs categories. In addition, it is important to conduct a qualitative study in order to explore why information sharing did not have a significant influence on COIWB.

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